

2013 Franklin County Approved Budget

Board President's Budget Message

Presented by County Commissioner Paula Brooks

12/18/12

A budget is far more than numbers on spreadsheets. It represents our full investment strategy and the fulfillment of our commitment to the communities we serve. Quite literally, it is our blueprint for investing in the future of Franklin County.

So, with that in mind -- and with the thoughts of what we talked about at the beginning of this session (a moment of silence for the children of Newtown, Connecticut) -- I would ask that we dedicate the passage of this budget to the children of Franklin County. Because, without a doubt, our children ARE the future of Franklin County.

And it's fitting that we vote on this budget as our last act of the year -- at our last meeting of the year -- giving us an opportunity to reflect on the incredible returns on our investment from 2012 and to look ahead to 2013 and the ways in which the decisions in this room impact our County's children and all of our residents, our businesses, and our overall quality of life.

Earlier this year, we County Commissioners launched the "Investing in our Next Generation Initiative" as a way to better quantify some of these impacts. The idea was to highlight all that's being done at Franklin County to make critical investments in our children and youth. It was to strategically examine both the investments and the impacts these efforts have and how ALL of our partners and agencies can work better together.

In 2012, these Next Generation investments totaled roughly \$343 million.

And in return, we broke a record on the number of youth and young adults who were able to "learn, earn, and return" by having Summer jobs or paid internships. We provided hundreds of at-risk children and teenagers with healthy summer camps and with after-school learning opportunities. We joined First Lady Michelle Obama to encourage our children and families to "Let's Move" and we broadened a groundbreaking program to increase the early detection of developmental delays in preschoolers.

We funded efforts to help more teens with drug and behavioral problems... to protect more kids from internet predators... to prevent Congressional cuts from impacting the collection of child support... and to find innovative approaches to helping the victims of childhood abuse and neglect.

We invested in youth science and arts education... and thanks to my colleague Marilyn Brown - we hosted the "Imagine" art exhibit of youth-made recycled art in our Courthouse Pavilion.

Looking back, our "Investing in the Next Generation" effort was touched - in one way or another - by nearly every Franklin County agency and office.

So too was our priority on safety.

We know that when families don't feel safe or when businesses don't feel secure, they don't thrive and grow. Franklin County is growing because of our dedication and investment in safety. Columbus Business First newspaper just reported that Franklin County is now estimated to grow 38% from 1990 to more than 1.3 million residents by the year 2030. That makes us the only urban county in Ohio to be growing... and it means the demands on our services - especially safety - will grow.

We met that demand head-on back in the Summer, when dangerous storms left entire neighborhoods wrecked and without power -- and parched by oppressive heat. This Board acted quickly to declare a state of emergency, one of the first in the state, to ensure that our communities had the emergency assistance they needed. We made certain our Seniors had transportation to safe locations. We helped our most-vulnerable residents access food and financial assistance, and we made the resources available for our local businesses to clean up, re-open, and recover.

Also this year, we helped our townships target and tear-down a dozen abandoned homes were magnets of crime, and we established the County Land Bank to stop more neglected properties from pulling down entire neighborhoods. We invested in a new class of Deputies Sheriffs to prevent retirements from dwindling the ranks of our safety forces and took the next steps in building a Next Generation 9-1-1 system.

And we advanced our focus on Food Security -- with my colleague John O'Grady as a leading advocate -- by investing in the Mid-Ohio Food Bank, by opening and supporting more community gardens, and by giving residents healthier options at corner markets.

Safety and security - in all of their forms - are vital components to the future success of our region.

Success has also come in our efforts to put people back to work and to grow our region's economic potential. Today the unemployment rate in Franklin County stands around 5-and-a-half percent and by some accounts, we've recovered at least 80% or more of the jobs lost during the recession. Nevertheless, we need to do more to address unemployment and the need for new knowledge economy skills our children will need. This means every child must be learning ready when they begin kindergarten.

This year, our Columbus Franklin County Financing Port Authority (that this Board created in 2006) and public-private partnerships -- coupled with strategic incentives in workforce development -- have allowed us to retain and attract the jobs of the future.

Quantum Health - 525 new jobs. Discover Financial - 162 new jobs. IBM - 500 new jobs... just to name a few.

These are the exact kinds of results commissioners have asked our economic development team to target with the "Smart Works in Franklin County" policy. Micro-enterprise lending. The most successful ever "Retail Summit." At Easton Town Center. The "Hiring our Heroes" job fair to connect veterans with jobs and workforce training. These are putting people to work, and putting food on families' tables.

Personally exciting as a goal reached, is the opening of the new Downtown Hilton, coupled with continued investment in the region's \$7.8 Billion tourism industry -- these are not only putting people to work... they're raising the profile of this county to international levels.

We even capped the year with news of the National Association of Counties naming Franklin County as the host county for our 2017 Annual Conference, bringing thousands of leaders from around our nation to enjoy our number one in America Zoo, and other attractions like our own Champions: the Clippers baseball team at Huntington Park.

This coming summer we have the Large County Caucus here... then thousands will attend the international Presidents Cup Golf Tournament coming to Franklin County and the city of Dublin next fall. They have selected our new Hilton Hotel in downtown Columbus as their headquarters! Great regional cooperation!

Next year, tourism spending alone will bring more than \$7.9 billion to our region, support more than 61,000 jobs, and reduce the tax burden for every Franklin County family by an estimated \$2200. Yes...a reduction in our taxes!

All of these accomplishments -- in how we serve our children, how we protect our communities, and how we create new jobs -- demonstrate the great return on our investments when we are strategic and responsible in our budgeting. Our fiscal stewardship will ensure that Franklin County maintains and protects its double triple-A bond rating, one of the best in the nation...and for years now, the only highest rating among Ohio counties.

This Board's commitment to fiscal sustainability has carried us far -- watching over every dime -- we even have a 2007 Fiscal Sustainability resolution that other counties use as a model on how to succeed as we have.

The boost in revenue from collection of the sales tax is a bright spot -- revealing that consumer confidence is growing stronger. However, at \$1.28 billion, the total 2013 "all

funds" budget represents approximately 3-percent LESS in county investments from the previous year. This is primarily because Franklin County is now fully realizing the impact of nearly \$41 million in state funding reductions that came from Governor Kasich's administration.

As we heard in our series of budget presentations, stretched dollars only give so much until they break. My, have we stretched. Back when I was a new Commissioner in 2005, we had to take action to shore up a badly damaged fiscal situation. The County Tax Commission had even signed a budget with a \$60 million deficit. We said, "No way!" And on a two-to-one vote, we righted that ship. We told the people we would make those dollars stretch for 5 to 7 years -- we had no idea the recession was ahead of us, massive state cuts would come after that, and the housing market would lose value and our public investment portfolio would face a drastic loss on its yield. Yet we stretched those dollars -- even into 2013 -- making it into an EIGHTH CONSECUTIVE year of a balanced budget!! And retaining our triple AAA bond rating. I am proud of that accomplishment.

At the end of 2013 we may be facing the recognition that stretching anymore is at a point of breaking. Population growth costs coupled with -- especially children -- who rely on the safety net provided by our social service agencies are too great for us to fall short. So to the Governor and General Assembly as well as the Congress, we hope they realize just how much we need them to step up and provide... because - as our long list of accomplishments show - we counties ARE worth the investment. Our people And our CHILDREN and their future are worth that.

The fact that our budget will be tighter next year does not change the results we should expect. Our county is growing. Our economy is growing. And our future is looking brighter. With our vote on this 2013 budget for Franklin County, we invest in that "better" tomorrow.

As President of the Board of Commissioners this year, I thank my colleagues, our Administrators, and all of the fellow elected officials, Agency and Department Directors, Boards, and staff for helping this year. And we thank the public and the taxpayers for the resources we have had.

Together, we should feel a sense of pride in how others across the nation look to Franklin County as a leader: NACO, the EcoSummit, the National Homeland Security Conference.

I also want to particularly thank the County Administration -- County Administrator Don Brown, Deputy Administrators Bill Flaherty, Ken Wilson, and Eric Janas -- and our Budget and Management Staff. Let me also thank our Commissioner agencies and office -- and their leadership teams -- as well the Sheriff, Treasurer, Clerk, Coroner, and all of our electeds including the Judges and Prosecutor -- and those who serve on our boards and commissions.

In the spirit of the holiday season -- and in honor of the children of Franklin County -- let us take stock of the future at the passing of this 2013 County Budget, and let us have hope for true peace and good will for all people in Franklin County, in America, and for children in places like Israel, Greece and Syria where the fear of immediate danger and hunger also face these little ones.

Today let's celebrate (local Olympic silver medalist) Abby Johnston and all of our children and youth reaching their full potential. God Bless you all and God Bless our children.